

TRANSLINK

BURNABY MOUNTAIN GONDOLA TRANSIT PROJECT

Monday, July 25, 2011
Hillside Place Housing Cooperative Inc.
173-8400 Forest Grove Drive
Burnaby BC



Notes from a Burnaby Mountain Gondola Transit Project meeting, held Monday, July 25, 2011 at the Hillside Place Housing Cooperative, Multi-purpose Room (during the general meeting), Burnaby, BC

PRESENT:

Members of the Hillside Place Housing Cooperative - Names are not disclosed due to privacy reasons

ALSO PRESENT:

Jeff Busby, TransLink
Andrew Brooke, TransLink
Kristin Lillyman, TransLink
Susan Campbell, Note Taker, Corporate Consulting

The meeting commenced at 7:30 p.m., and the TransLink presentation and question and answer session was part of the Hillside Place Cooperative's general meeting. There were approximately 70-persons in attendance for the general meeting and 34-persons signed the TransLink attendance sheet.

1. INTRODUCTION

Andrew Brooke, TransLink, thanked everyone for attending and explained that the purpose of the session was to provide a brief overview of the project and clarify issues and understand concerns so that they can be addressed. Accordingly, there will be a brief presentation and then an open Question & Answer format for discussion.

Participants were further advised that this public consultation was a part of the Phase Two consultation for the project (stakeholder meetings and two open houses) and that this sub-phase will include six small group meetings with residents in the overall Forest Grove area. Finally, it is important to note that no decisions have been made at this point.

2. PRESENTATION

Jeff Busby, TransLink reviewed the parameters of the study and referenced the maps.

What will I cover?

- Why are we studying a gondola?
- Planning process
- Project status and next steps
- Comments to date

Why are studying a gondola?

- Significant transit destination – 25,000 daily trips, most connect to SkyTrain
- Buses every 1 minute:20 seconds today; 50-seconds as mountain grows or mode share increases



- Weather and reliability
- Plans call for:
 - Increased transit ridership
 - Reduced environmental impact
 - Cost effective investments

Planning Process

- Previous feasibility study sponsored by others in 2009
- TransLink sponsored an independent planning study and business case
- Ground based and aerial technologies were reviewed
 - Sought to improve travel time, reliability, environmental impacts at reasonable cost
- Aerial alignment options
 - Minimize residential and conservation impacts
 - Maximize connectivity to SkyTrain and SFU
 - Minimize length (travel time and cost)
- 15 minutes to 6.5 minutes; Every 3-10 minutes to every 40s; similar hours SkyTrain
- High ratio of benefits to costs

Project Status and Next Steps

- Operating savings up to \$3m annually compared to buses
- Project not included in our 2012 plans (base or supplement)
- Seeking senior government or partner funding
- Implementation requires
 - Funding in annual plan
 - Environmental assessment
 - Access agreements (Burnaby and others)
 - Design and construction plan with public input

Comments to Date

- Comments either strongly supportive or strongly opposed; very few moderate responses
- Environmental, travel time and reliability benefits
- Resident concerns
 - Privacy
 - Safety
 - Noise
 - Neighbourhood character
- Impacts to conservation areas (trees and wildlife)
- The cost of the project
- Relationship to Evergreen Line
- Priority



TransLink is interested in a gondola because of its potential to offer better reliability, faster travel times, higher transit capacity with fewer diesel buses, reduced noise and emissions for green house gases (GHG) and other pollutants and reduced operating times. TransLink recognizes that concerns exist specific to the residents of Forest Grove and wants to do the best to understand and address them.

3. QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS

(The following abbreviations will be used and mean: Q=Question, A=Answer, C=Comment.)

Q: My question is about noise, how noisy is the gondola? Is it noisier than SkyTrain or less noisy?

A: *Jeff Busby, TransLink:* It is much less noisy than SkyTrain. The gondolas are powered at the bottom and those engines can be shielded for noise. The gondolas themselves roll on cables and are at about the 50-decibel level; conversation is at about 60-decibels and diesel buses are at about 90-decibels. However, noise is relevant and those decibel levels should be considered a general rule of thumb.

Q: I understand that other routes were considered particularly one connecting to the Evergreen Line - why is that not being considered?

A: *Jeff Busby, TransLink:* Right, the Evergreen Line is going ahead and right now the Mayors' Council is considering a vote on it. We looked at a number of routes and the route that was recommended was illustrated on the map. It will be Ash Crescent that will have the gondola passing over it. We looked at a number of ways to connect to SkyTrain and there was not really a perfect answer and this alignment was the best one in terms of being the shortest, the fastest and the least expensive to build. We did try to look at all the other routes and they all had positives and negatives associated with them.

Q: How many gondolas will be going up and down the line?

A: *Jeff Busby, TransLink:* The gondola can carry 3,000 persons an hour and that means 19-cabins circulating back and forth every 40-seconds.

Q: Are there any other stops on the gondola, will you still have to run buses? It looks like you will still need the buses for the residents and especially if the population increases.

A: *Jeff Busby, TransLink:* The #136 bus will not be impacted and service will be increased if the need is there. The bus route affected the most is the #145 route and that is the route we are looking at replacing with the gondola and where the savings are generated.

Q: Where does the #145 run?

A: *Jeff Busby, TransLink:* The route was illustrated on the map.

Q: Well that is not a benefit to us – this is about a loss of privacy, it is noisy and will mean more money in taxes, am I right?

A: *Jeff Busby, TransLink:* That is your perspective.



- Q: I see that the funding for the Evergreen Line is still not resolved – how will they fund this and how much more will it cost us? Will the HST or the PST go up? How will TransLink realistically fund this and how much per family per person does this mean?
- A: *Jeff Busby, TransLink:* The cost for the Evergreen Line is approximately \$1.4 billion with \$400 million in funding coming from the region and with the remainder coming from the federal and provincial governments (approximately \$800 million). The Mayors' Council has proposed increasing the tax on fuel by 2 cents and is looking at the property tax and other means for funding sources.
- Q: Just remember that we are the funding source, the taxpayers; and, I would love to see the Evergreen Line built and more transit from Surrey. What assurance do we have that the Evergreen Line will be built first?
- A: *Jeff Busby, TransLink:* The Evergreen Line is in the TransLink plan and the gondola is not in the plan. TransLink is committed to spend the funding on the bus service now and the difference between the bus service and a proposed gondola service is quite small and we haven't even begun the process of talking to senior governments. If we have savings from not running buses then we only have to ask for a small amount of additional funding from other partners and this seems like a good thing to pursue.
- Q: Are those figures you quoted firm, or will costs go up?
- A: *Jeff Busby, TransLink:* We have done a good job of estimating a project that is full of uncertainty and we think \$120 million, for the gondola project, is a reasonable number. That \$70 million figure that was referenced earlier was produced by an earlier study of nearly 3-years ago.
- Q: I have worked at SFU for 18-years and I have never been stuck on that mountain and I don't see that project benefiting anyone in this area except to raise fees. Buses run up there empty and SFU needs to look at changing its schedule and not have everyone all trying to leave the upper campus at 5:30 p.m. The gondola won't help me or anyone else in the area. It is 8-km from here to SFU and if I took the gondola it would increase my travel time because when I arrived on campus I would have about a 20-minute walk. I don't see this helping anyone out. SFU needs to do more work and more planning and the gondola is not the answer. This is the nicest community and we don't want something buzzing overhead and remember that it will be constant buzzing. Right now the only constant thing is the birds and the wind. This gondola won't benefit us although smaller buses running through here would be a benefit. In the winter time the accordion buses are a horror show and have jackknifed around vehicles and I won't sit in the back of those buses. You have to remember it is a mountain and they have to remember that when they buy up there. All those people up there in their \$300,000 homes get a U-Pass and this community is tired of supporting other communities that get



freebies. People here scourge to get their bus fares and people up there get them free and it is not fair.

A: *Jeff Busby, TransLink:* SFU is working on updating their transportation plan and looking at converting one-way roads to two-way roads and this would help with the distribution of the traffic flow. The public consultation summary report is just finishing now and as soon as it is completed it will be posted on the (TransLink) website.

Q: My main concern is the infrequency of the #136 bus and you said bus frequency would be adjusted according to demand – so could there be any perks to a neighbourhood? I am open to bribery and why not build us a bus shelter – are trade-offs being discussed? I want U-Passes, bus shelters and more frequent buses.

A: *Jeff Busby, TransLink:* Those are the things we want to hear and if the project moves ahead we can put together a package of investment in consultation with the community.

Q: Will the gondola accommodate people with disabilities?

A: *Jeff Busby, TransLink:* Yes and the accommodations were demonstrated on the presentation boards. There will be a station attendant and the attendant can slow the gondola down or stop it to assist people boarding or getting off. The gondolas are fully accessible. There are 19-cabins and several of the cabins could be configured differently in that one of the cabins, for instance, could have fewer seats that could accommodate more bikes or wheelchairs for example.

Q: What are the hours of operation?

A: *Jeff Busby, TransLink:* At this point there is nothing definitive but the thinking is to match the SkyTrain hours of approximately 6am to midnight.

Q: What about the #145 bus cancellation? I think that you have to keep that bus for people terrified of heights.

A: *Jeff Busby, TransLink:* I am not sure of the prevalence of people afraid of heights however the #144 would not be affected - that might be the bus option. Also the #135 bus would stay the same.

Q: Do the cabins circulate every 40 seconds on a 24/7 basis?

A: *Jeff Busby, TransLink:* Not 24 hours – the hours of operation would likely be from 6:00 a.m. to midnight. Remember that we can take some cabins off when the system is not busy and in the busy time we would run all 19-cabins. You can also slow the system down - ski resorts do this all the time when they are not busy.

Q: I think it (gondola) is not needed. The Evergreen Line will have surplus bus service hours left over and where will they be allocated? If the problem now is to service SFU there will be lots of buses from the Canada Line and you



don't need to spend \$120 million to service SFU. This is not necessary because you can reallocate other bus service hours.

A: *Jeff Busby, TransLink:* That is a fair comment and that is why we are prioritizing the gondola in the list of projects. As well we plan on putting together a prioritization of service hours and adding service hours (about 9% more service hours are projected to be added in 2014). There is a lot riding on this supplemental plan and all part of the efforts to move in the direction of the objectives in the long-term plan.

C: There will be thousands of hours available and this is totally unnecessary.

Q: We don't know the population of SFU to put the \$120 million into and if we add in SkyTrain how many will use those services and then we have maintenance issues and then we have to have those numbers.

A: *Jeff Busby, TransLink:* I agree we need to do a better job of laying out hours however we will be able to provide you with those numbers.

C: I don't think that many people use the buses.

Q: What does the SFU Trust mean? Which banks are funding the project?"

A: *Jeff Busby, TransLink:* The SFU Trust was created around the year 2000 to raise money for the university to support its' academic mission and it is similar to what UBC is doing. UBC is taking lands in the southern end of their campus and developing them to support the academic mission of the university.

Q: Which banks are funding?

A: *Jeff Busby, TransLink:* I am not sure of the specific name but the word 'trust' refers to the name of the group supporting SFU. SFU stands for Simon Fraser University.

Q: How many buses per day? 50?

A: *Jeff Busby, TransLink:* There are 42-buses arriving in an hour. The #145 route has about 22-buses that are constantly running in the peak times.

Q: TransLink bought those buses, brand new at about \$1-\$1.5 million apiece - they have already spent that money and now you want to take those buses and where will they go?

A: *Jeff Busby, TransLink:* TransLink orders about 100 new buses a year as the fleet is always being renewed with buses being retired every year. The buses could be redeployed if they are not needed there.

Q: \$120 million to build - what is the operating cost?

A: *Jeff Busby, TransLink:* About \$3 million a year but overtime the savings will grow and other levels of government may give TransLink a grant and we could use that to reduce the cost.

C: I would rather see TransLink to White Rock or Langley.

A: *Jeff Busby, TransLink:* I agree.



Q: Will a business case be produced? Will it be on the website? I would imagine that electricity costs are easier to estimate.

A: *Jeff Busby, TransLink:* The business case will be posted to the (TransLink) website as soon as it is ready – currently it is being finalized. It is difficult to project diesel costs and hydro costs are variable and subject to changes. It is not a straightforward case.

Q: Why not use the Barnett corridor and connect on that side?

A: *Jeff Busby, TransLink:* Barnett is on the other side and more than half of the commuters are on SkyTrain and they need to find a way to get up the mountain. A Barnett route is not as direct.

Q: What about a SkyTrain across Hastings to Port Moody?

A: *Jeff Busby, TransLink:* That SkyTrain line you have just described is very expensive and there are trade-offs on where to spend money.

Q: This is a tourist attraction – would people ski? The best system to move people around the world, what is it?

A: *Jeff Busby, TransLink:* I am a transportation planner and this is my job – we looked at the buses and they are a good solution, at a relatively low cost, and if we do anything else we could build SkyTrain or a funicular for example...

Q: Why not a train, every big city has one – SkyTrain is the big bucks but city trains can move and put around for people. How many hours on this project, for what – this is just loose money for nothing? The train is quiet and replaces at least 4-buses and costs less.

A: *Jeff Busby, TransLink:* The challenge with the train is that it must run up a very steep mountain with a winding route.

Q: I used to live in Switzerland and electric trams are the best system on wheels – did you look at that?

A: *Jeff Busby, TransLink:* We did look at it but we didn't pursue it for the reasons I have just explained.

4. **NEXT STEPS – Andrew Brooke**

- Thank you for allowing us to come and meet with you tonight and if you have any further questions please contact us at TransLink.
- We will continue to work with you and the other communities and remember that we are at the beginning of a long process.

5. **CLOSURE**

The meeting closed at 8:34 p.m.